

Pérez Sánchez, Francisco Calvo Serraller o Jonathan Brown. El descubrimiento de un valioso cuadro desconocido de Velázquez —quizá la Venus del Espejo pintada de frente como retrato de la esposa de uno de los principales nobles de la corte de Felipe IV— imprime sobre la trama una tensión adicional que acaba resolviéndose en nada. El cuadro se pierde, España se dirige a su deriva y Anthony Whitelands, siguiendo el cetro del Conde Duque de Olivares, vuelve a su casa como un extraño al que, sin embargo, esta peripecia subyugante y puede que al final un poco excesiva ha convertido en una persona completamente distinta de la que llegó.

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D'Ors, Pablo. *El amigo del desierto*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2009. 137 pp.

Commenting on Pablo d'Ors's earlier novel, *Lecciones de ilusión*, this reviewer suggested that the text could be considered a culmination of those works that strove, beginning in the late nineteen-sixties, to liberate themselves from a dependency upon contemporary peninsular culture. With *El amigo del desierto*, however, d'Ors takes that liberation to a further extreme. This is not simply a result of the author's having studied and lived outside of Spain, although that is definitely a defining factor in his definition of himself as both author and narrator (the author has referred in an interview to the autobiographical content of his novels). It is also the consequence of his desire to avoid as much as possible any commonly known geographical and sociological referent that would tie his readers to a given place and a time, when what he seeks is an almost non-describable expanse that will serve as background for an existential and philosophical expression of the human being's understanding of him/herself in the world. That expanse is found in the Saharan desert, which constitutes the geographical context for most of the plot, if one could call it that, of this extremely personalized text, personalized in the sense of its almost entire concentration upon the narrator, interrupted solely by a few unresolved episodes.

In this sense, *El amigo del desierto* is to be considered a continuation, perhaps an illustration, of what he offered in *Lecciones de ilusión*, where, as we wrote in our earlier review, the text "purports to offer to the reader, as well as to the writer ... an understanding of one's inner self as a means to find happiness." As d'Ors himself tells us in that novel "El hombre que es feliz siempre crea un espacio: una casa, un libro, un horizonte nuevo al que viajar y en donde hincar, aunque sea metafóricamente, una bandera" (*Lecciones* 588). In the present novel, that "horizonte nuevo" is the desert, in which the narrator/protagonist is able to come into complete contact with his inner self as his fellow characters simply fade into the

background, leaving him, in his third and final excursion to the desert, alone, to reach the conclusion of his struggle to find a place for himself in the human race.

The novel is thus a continuation of the many philosophical constructs that we have seen in d'Ors's earlier texts, although here, where there is no specific mention of particular philosophers and their theories, one finds rather a philosophical stance more connected to writers of fiction, such as Kafka, Camus, and Gide (whose novel *The Immoralist*, in fact, takes place in North Africa). One is also tempted, however, to find a communion with the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas, specifically the concept of infinity, as opposed to a limiting totality, given that d'Ors's narrator speaks similarly of the elimination of a limiting finality: "Mi actividad no conduce a ningún fin: tampoco el desierto parece conducir a ninguna parte; también él se me aparece despojado de toda finalidad. La eliminación de esa finalidad—esa indiferencia frente a todo en que consiste, según creo, la libertad—es probablemente lo que me seduce de este lugar." (125)

Whether purposely or not, d'Ors's narrator also recalls the age old topic of the city vs. the country, in which, from Horace on, the country is seen as the peaceful and poetic prescription for the city's ills. The wide open Sahara affords the narrator the opportunity to escape from the many confines of city life, and leads him to the point of glorifying, despite its poverty, the non-materialistic life of the desert's inhabitants: "¿Por qué es tan feliz toda esta gente, si vive entre tanta pobreza?, me preguntaba. Porque la pobreza externa les remite hacia su interior, y porque es allí—dentro, me respondía—donde descubren que hay una riqueza que no se marchita. Belleza y pobreza: el binomio más misterioso, el más esencial. Cuanto más pobre y desolado era el paisaje que me rodeaba—concluí—, tanto más rico y lleno me sentía por dentro. Tanto más sabio cuantos menos pensamientos tenía o, para ser más preciso, cuanto más ajeno era al hecho mismo de pensar." (124) Although the idea of poverty leading to happiness is a distinctly conservative concept, one can find, in this very quote, a justification of the narrator's viewpoint, and it is in the creation and development of the text itself. The entire text progresses toward the moment at which existential thought and description of nature combine in a climactic moment at which the narrator is freed, physically and emotionally, from all of civilization's constraints. That moment, when the sky and the earth join hands and the multitude of stars gradually appear, is when the reader, through the narrator's perspective, finally feels the total effect of what has earlier been a fairly simple plot development that now gives way to a visual description that serves as a conduit for the expression of the author's existential argument.

Because of the simple plot development referred to above, *El amigo del desierto* is a challenging text; one constantly wonders where the plot is headed, as does the narrator himself. But also because of that very careful development, the narrator is able to hold the reader's interest,

and the final identification with a world that is totally foreign both to the narrator and to most readers creates, visually and emotionally, a climactic conclusion that totally supports the existential philosophy d'Ors presents to the reader in this novel.

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Contreras, Miguel Ángel. *Libro de precisiones*. Madrid: Bartleby Editores, 2012. 59 pp.

Libro de precisiones de Miguel Ángel Contreras (Guadix, Granada, 1968) es un juguete de poesía, un poemario de cuarenta reflexiones en un particular diálogo entre naturaleza y existencia. Una naturaleza interna, la del desierto, y una existencia externa, la del yo poético, que cabalgan por las riendas comunes del sentir literario. El poemario se abre con un metafísico proemio centrado en la mutación de un metafórico espacio desértico, advertido por la noche habitada de calles despobladas, voces y miradas en silencio. El yo poético rápidamente percibe un ambiente desolador. No hemos leído media página y ya se observa la conciencia poética en primera persona, tres veces anunciando la situación: “Entré por la boca del subsuelo”, “Me vi en los pasillos del subsuelo”, “Me hallé de pronto en un desierto donde éramos nosotros la arena granulada...” (9) A partir de ahora nuestra complicidad está en convivir con la metamorfosis que se produce en ese espacio poético afectado apresuradamente por el desgaste imparable (“La erosión avanzaba hacia mí con paso firme”). El final del proemio nos sitúa en “el epicentro de un desierto invertido”, un mundo de contraste donde lo lleno es muestra indiscutible de lo vacío, y la presencia muestra de la ausencia.

Siguen al proemio diecinueve poemas centrados en el desierto. Son poemas de búsqueda interior, incluso de aparente pesimismo, en el invertido mundo del desierto: “Cómo poder encontrarte, en esa inmensa mancha de arena/ que es el desierto que te cubre” (II, 14) “Desierto y soledad/ se acompañan [...] y se prolongan” (III, 15) hasta el esperado encuentro “Te he encontrado/ entre las sombras [...] Te he encontrado desnuda,/ desnuda y cubierta/ por millones de partículas” (V, 17). Pero en el desierto la realidad y la imaginación se confunden, en mundo mágico. En el poema VI (18) el yo poético, agitado, nervioso, conocedor del destino, advierte en tono lorquiano de la peligrosidad del visitante. Llama la atención la selección gramatical con futuros simples (“se te echarán encima.” “Te juzgarán, te condenarán”), subjuntivos (“¡No compartas jamás con ellos” “no permitas que escupan en tu memoria!”) e imperativos (“¡Huye de lo que es la oquedad!” “¡Huye de lo que no sea be-